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ABSTRACT

The digest is based on a full length report (with the same title) on postsecondary developmental programs. The full report provides a definitive review of the literature and institutional practice on the topic. Postsecondary developmental programs at institutions of higher education encompass a variety of courses and services that are conducted to provide assistance to individuals who have been denied regular admission to the institution because of failure to meet specified admission and placement requirements or because of predicted risk in meeting the requirements of college-level courses. These services focus primarily on skills in reading, writing, mathematics, and study and test-taking strategies, as well as personal adjustment and other affective variables crucial to success in the college curriculum. Such programs began evolving as early as the mid-1800s when in response to the needs of underprepared students, programs classified as college preparatory served many of the same goals. Changes in labeling of preparatory programs are associated with the changes in student populations (reflecting the wide range of student statuses). Many developmental program models have emerged as a result of the growing diversity among enrollees. Remedial programs are perceived by their supporters as additions to, not replacements for, a required curriculum. They have helped fulfill the mission of providing equal educational opportunity in a democratic society. Enrollment in these programs has increased in recent years, and the trend will most likely continue into the 1990s and beyond. Contains 6 references. (SM)

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ERIC DIGEST

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Postsecondary Developmental Programs: A Traditional Agenda with New Imperatives

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What Is Postsecondary Developmental Education?

Developmental programs at institutions of higher education encompass a variety of courses and services that are conducted to provide assistance to individuals who have been denied regular admission to the institution because of failure to meet specified admission and placement requirements or because of predicted risk in meeting the requirements of college-level courses. These services focus primarily on skills in reading, writing, mathematics, and study and test-taking strategies, as well as personal adjustment and other affective variables that are critical to success in the college curriculum.

How Have Developmental Programs Evolved?

In response to the needs of the underprepared student, programs classified as "college preparatory" since the mid-1800s have served many of the same goals as those programs that have more recently been labeled "academic development," "learning assistance," or "developmental studies." The change in the labeling of preparatory programs is, to some extent, associated with the change in student populations. Whereas socioeconomic status, instead of ability, was once the primary determinant of attendance at a college or university, the student population now admitted to institutions of higher education through developmental programs or the regular curriculum reflects a wide range of statuses in terms of race, ethnic origin, socioeconomic background, high school grade point average, age, and career objectives. A major factor in this diversity has been admissions policy in response to society's evolving perception of the role and value of higher education.

As a result of the growing diversity among enrollees at postsecondary institutions of learning, a number of developmental program models have emerged. Some of these models are comprehensive and some are specialized. There are at least four different types of program categories: college campus tutorial/remedial, college outreach programs, campus assistance centers, and off-campus instruction. The specific types of intervention involve the teaching/learning process, counseling, peer support, and supplemental use of media and the arts to develop students' articulation of basic skills and the application of those skills to various content areas in the college curriculum.

Of the numerous developmental programs across the nation, several can be identified as exemplars in terms of their success. Many programs, including those considered successful, have encountered a variety of problems, however. The continuous burdens that these programs face include problems of funding, staff recruitment and retention, admission and placement standards, minority student enrollment, the quality of tests, the relativity of curriculum, and perceptions of the program.

The evolution of academic assistance programs can be characterized as a progression from service for a small segment of the total population through the use of limited techniques and limited funds to service for a broad span of the nation's population by means of a more cohesive and comprehensive effort and the support of regularly budgeted programs. Expenditures for the administration of developmental programs vary across institutions and states and have ranged from $6 million for one state system to $12 million for one university. Approximately 90 percent of all institutions of higher education provide some developmental service, at least 30 percent of the national population in higher education is enrolled in some aspect of these services, and 33 percent of institutions report having a separate department or division for developmental studies or learning centers.

Postsecondary remedial education and its relationship to equity are often perceived to be in conflict with the desire to maintain high standards and cost efficiency. Although a substantial segment of popular opinion holds that developmental courses should be conducted exclusively at the two-year, community-college level, proponents of multilevel distribution of developmental services argue that even the best institutions in the nation have "low" students who benefit from such services. Senior colleges and universities house schools of education with faculty and graduate students specializing in the areas of remedial education and counseling, which are essential to developmental programs, and positive results have been reported in evaluations of services at two-year, four-year, and university levels. Moreover, two-year colleges have often experienced the same problems in their efforts to deliver remedial services as have other types of institutions.

Will Developmental Programs Decrease the Integrity of Academic Institutions?

Popular opinion often maintains that developmental programs dilute academic programs, but proponents of developmental programs argue that their role is to support and enrich the regular curriculum so that more students will succeed. Thus, remedial programs are perceived by their supporters as additions to, not replacements for, a required curriculum.

Postsecondary developmental programs have helped to fulfill the mission of providing equal educational opportunity in a democratic society. These programs have provided a "last chance" for many individuals to obtain worthwhile experiences in higher education that will enable them to find meaningful participation in employment and community life. Where institutions of higher education have had to strive to maintain a balance between the competition for student enrollments and a standard of excellence, developmental programs have helped to increase the pool of qualified incoming freshmen. Thus, the institution has served the community while serving itself.

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What Is the Future for Postsecondary Developmental Programs?

Enrollment in developmental programs has increased in recent years, and the trend will most likely continue into the 1990s and beyond. Observable and projected changes in the diversity of levels of preparedness of high school graduates, sociological and technological change, employment trends, and other demographic factors will continue to create educational needs that will require higher education's commitment to developmental assistance.

New precollege curriculum requirements, new admissions and placement standards, and new trends in college curriculum will all create continuous need for academic support of college applicants who fall short of meeting the challenge of these changes. The preparation of teachers and administrators and the capacity of public policy to address these concerns will have to be monitored by long-term evaluation processes, which will add momentum to the refinement of developmental programs.

Emerging theories for training intelligence, enhancing intelligence, and using the application of philosophy to develop the art of thinking all hold great potential for meeting the challenges that lie ahead in developmental curriculum for verbal comprehension, visual/spatial problem solving, and the logic of communication—critical aspects of basic skills instruction and individual competence.

The impact of developmental programs will also be strengthened by administrative training for developmental personnel—currently recognized as a priority for developmental educators. The doctoral degree program in developmental education at Grambling University, for example, has recently incorporated a specialization in management in higher education, and institutions across the nation have negotiated to enroll their faculty in this program. Doctoral programs in developmental education are also in place at other institutions, and national organizations have been established to support professional endeavors for developmental personnel.

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